04/02/24 BIG TECH

The WHO's Power Grab + More

The Defender's Big Brother NewsWatch brings you the latest headlines related to governments' abuse of power, including attacks on democracy, civil liberties and use of mass surveillance. The views expressed in the excerpts from other news sources do not necessarily reflect the views of The Defender.

By The Defender Staff

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The WHO's Power Grab

City Journal reported:

> The response to COVID was the greatest mistake in the history of the public health profession, but the officials responsible for it are determined to do even worse. With the support of the Biden administration, the World Health Organization (WHO) is seeking unprecedented powers to impose its policies on the United States and the rest of the world during the next pandemic.
>
> It was bad enough that America and other countries voluntarily followed WHO bureaucrats' disastrous pandemic advice instead of heeding the scientists who had presciently warned, long before 2020, that lockdowns, school closures, and mandates for masks and vaccines would be futile, destructive, and unethical. It was bad enough that U.S. officials and the corporate media parroted the WHO's false claims and ludicrous praise of China's response. But now the WHO wants new authority to make its

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Did the WHO Water Down Its 'Pandemic Treaty'? Not Really, Experts Say

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bureaucrats' whims mandatory — and to censor those who disagree with their version of "the science."

The WHO hopes to begin this power grab in May at its annual assembly in Geneva, where members will vote on proposed changes in international health regulations and a new treaty governing pandemics. Pamela Hamamoto, the State Department official representing the U.S. in negotiations, has already declared that America is committed to signing a pandemic treaty that will "build a stronger global health architecture," which is precisely what we don't need.

If we learned anything from the pandemic, it was the folly of entrusting narrow-minded public health officials with wide-ranging powers. The countries that fared best, like Sweden, were the ones that ignored the advice of the WHO, and the U.S. states that fared best, like Florida, were the ones that defied the White House Coronavirus Task Force and the Centers for Disease Control. This wasn't a new lesson. Previous research has shown that giving national leaders new powers to respond to a natural disaster typically leads to more fatalities and economic damage.

Rutgers University Lifts COVID Vaccine Requirement for Students, Staff

News 12 New Jersey reported:

Rutgers University lifted its COVID-19 vaccine requirement for students, staff and faculty members. The university made the announcement on its website on Monday.

The decision comes after Republican state Sen. Declan O'Scanlon called for the practice to end and also called for university officials to resign for their decision to continue requiring the vaccine.

"I'm glad Rutgers decided to join the rest of the enlightened world by finally lifting its COVID-19 vaccine requirement. This is something I have been calling for since last year. Having said that, Rutgers doesn't deserve any additional praise. In fact, it deserves to be harshly criticized for not following the science," O'Scanlon wrote in a statement.

Rutgers officials also say that the university won't require face coverings, but say that coverings "are welcomed."

Supreme Court Is Asked to Resolve Split Decision in Social Media Censorship Lawsuit

Reclaim the Net reported:

As swiftly as the pandemic — and more importantly, associated radical restrictive measures concerning people's everyday lives — descended onto the world, it all seemingly quickly vanished into thin air.

But the consequences, particularly related to the stifling of speech, live on in a number of legal battles being fought now to prove that both government(s) and social media were wrong to introduce mass censorship because of alleged COVID misinformation.

Now the New Civil Liberties Alliance (NCLA) has gotten involved in one of these cases by asking the Supreme Court to make a decision in the Changizi, Senger, and Kotzin v. HHS (United States Department of Health and Human Services) lawsuit.

The plaintiffs here claim that their First Amendment rights were violated by the HHS and the U.S. surgeon general — government agencies — going to Twitter, a private tech company, with the "request" to have their voices

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silenced for opposing the government's COVID mandates of the era.

Now, in light of the discovery process in a major, related in context, case deliberated by the Supreme Court — Murthy v. Missouri, NCLA believes that there is reason to review Cingazi et al v. HHS as well, specifically, to ascertain if the district court (later supported by the Sixth Circuit) was right to dismiss the case without allowing discovery.

User Privacy Must Come First With Biometrics

TechRadar reported:

> The rapid rise and expansion of artificial intelligence (AI) use cases in recent years has led to companies sharply increasing experimentation and adoption of facial recognition and other biometric technology in their consumer-facing products and services. Apple pioneered this when the company introduced Face ID, allowing users to open their iPhones with a simple scan of their face, transitioning the use of biometric data from innovation to normalization.
>
> Now, biometric data is a common form of personal currency, a firewall entirely unique to the individual. Use cases have expanded to airports with biometric boarding, mobile banking and e-commerce to facilitate and authenticate transactions, and even with various branches of law enforcement using it for surveillance purposes.
>
> The benefits of AI-powered facial recognition technology are off the charts, with the potential for dramatic increases in efficiency, security and ease of use across industries. But with the upside comes an equally compelling downside, as organizations need to consider the privacy risks and concerns associated with collecting and using biometric data at scale.
>
> Threat to individual privacy and personal rights: With the scale of facial recognition used in public places, soon users and citizens will not be able to go virtually anywhere in public without surveillance, posing a major threat to privacy when many already feel vulnerable.
>
> User privacy needs to be prioritized when handling biometric data. This information is so sensitive and personal that any innovation it can drive must take a backseat to privacy, as the harms of poorly implemented facial recognition technology outweigh the benefits.

Facebook Let Netflix Peek Into User DMs, Explosive Court Docs Claim

FOXBusiness reported:

> The social media giant Meta allegedly allowed Netflix to access Facebook users' direct messages for nearly a decade, breaking anti-competitive activities and privacy rules, explosive court documents claim. The court documents, which were unsealed last week, are part of a major anti-trust lawsuit filed by U.S. citizens Maximilian Klein and Sarah Grabert, who claim Netflix and Facebook "enjoyed a special relationship" so that Netflix could better tailor its ads with Facebook.
>
> Facebook received millions of dollars in ad revenue from Netflix as part of these close ties, guaranteeing ad spending of $150 million in 2017, the lawsuit claims.
>
> In 2018, the New York Times published a report citing hundreds of pages of Facebook documents, alleging Facebook had authorized Spotify and Netflix to access users' DMs. The publication reported that the connections helped Facebook gain explosive growth and bolstered its ad revenue streams.

Meta has already been fined for sharing users' information without permission. In 2022, Ireland fined Meta $284 million after data about more than half a billion users was leaked online.

U.S. Defense Official Had 'Havana Syndrome' Symptoms During a 2023 NATO Summit, the Pentagon Confirms

Associated Press reported:

> A senior Defense Department official who attended last year's NATO summit in Vilnius, Lithuania, had symptoms similar to those reported by U.S. officials who have experienced "Havana syndrome," the Pentagon confirmed Monday.
>
> Havana syndrome is still under investigation but includes a string of health problems dating back to 2016, when officials working at the U.S. Embassy in Havana reported sudden unexplained head pressure, head or ear pain, or dizziness.
>
> The injuries to U.S. government personnel or their families were part of a "60 Minutes" report Sunday that suggested Russia is behind the incidents, one of which took place during the 2023 NATO summit in Vilnius.
>
> The Pentagon's healthcare system has established a registry for employees or dependents to report such incidents. In March, however, a five-year study by the National Institutes of Health found no brain injuries or degeneration among U.S. diplomats and other government employees who had Havana syndrome symptoms.

U.S., Britain Announce Partnership on AI Safety, Testing

Reuters reported:

> The United States and Britain on Monday announced a new partnership on the science of artificial intelligence safety, amid growing concerns about upcoming next-generation versions.
>
> Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo and British Technology Secretary Michelle Donelan signed a memorandum of understanding in Washington to jointly develop advanced AI model testing, following commitments announced at an AI Safety Summit in Bletchley Park in November.
>
> Britain and the United States are among the countries establishing government-led AI safety institutes.
>
> Britain said in October its institute would examine and test new types of AI, while the United States said in November it was launching its own safety institute to evaluate risks from so-called frontier AI models and is now working with 200 companies and entites.

Poland Launches Investigation in Pegasus Spyware Use by Government

TechRadar reported:

> Following allegations made by Poland's current Prime Minister in February 2024, the Polish government has formally launched an investigation into the use of Pegasus spyware by the previous administration.
>
> Former officials who were involved in the use of the spyware will likely face criminal charges, with the victims potentially able to claim financial compensation and be involved in criminal proceedings.

Pegasus is a phone-based spyware that covertly hijacks the device providing full access to apps and files, while also turning the device into a 24/7 tracking and listening device.

A 2021 data leak, accessed by the Guardian, showed that thousands of telephone numbers spread across several countries were accessed by the Pegasus spyware, with a number of media outlets being targeted by governments in Eastern Europe, most notably by Hungary's Viktor Orbán.

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Mark J McGinty

18 days ago

>> Pamela Hamamoto, the State Department official representing the U.S. in negotiations, has already declared that America is committed to signing a pandemic treaty... <<

That is as dismal prospect as I have ever seen! After it is signed, how long does anyone think it will be, before the next plandemic magically crops up -- hell, there won't even need to be a novel antigen, WHO will have the power to simply declare a new "emergency". And it's been well established that Bill Gates has a great deal of influence over the WHO... I don't think 'terrifying' is excessively dramatic!

Is there absolutely nothing that we can do?

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